

Shorter Hospital Stays Yield Better Results for Vets With PTSD

During the latter 1990's the VA undertook dramatic, controversial reductions in hospital based care for veterans with military-related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Between 1995 and 1999, the number of PTSD inpatient beds dropped by 69% and the average length of stay fell from 38 to 18 days. Increased outpatient treatment and less intensive residential rehabilitation programs replaced lengthy hospital stays. To evaluate the impact of these changes, VISN 1 MIRECC researchers Robert Rosenheck, M.D., and Alan Fontana, Ph.D., studied the treatment outcomes of over 10,000 veterans from 37 different VA programs. Outcomes improved over time for programs that reduced the length of hospital stay. In contrast, programs that stuck with long term hospitalization showed no improvement over time. These inpatient reductions were undertaken to cut costs and were justified by Rosenheck and Fontana's earlier studies showing shorter hospitalization to be just as effective as long term stays. These new findings suggest that shorter treatments may actually be both better as well as less costly. The researchers attribute the improved effectiveness to the programs' increased focus on current problems of living and less emphasis on delving into painful wartime memories.